

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 5115

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJECT: MOOD IN SAIGON

SUMMARY:

MOOD AMONG VIETNAMESE, BOTH OFFICIALS AND OTHERS, SEEMS TO HAVE STABILIZED SOMEWHAT IN RECENT DAYS AS ARVN SUCCESSES HAVE STOPPED COMMUNIST ADVANCES. ALTHOUGH SOME PEOPLE ARE RETHINKING INITIAL EXTREME REACTIONS, HOWEVER, VIETNAMESE CONTINUE TO BE GRAVELY CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR PERSONAL FUTURE AND THAT OF THEIR COUNTRY. REACTIONS TO RECENT OCCURRENCES LIKE THE SPEECHES OF PRESIDENT FORD AND PRESIDENT THIEU AND THE FORMATION OF A NEW CABINET VARY WIDELY BUT ARE HEAVILY WEIGHTED ON PESSIMISTIC SIDE. ALL AGREE THAT MONEY FROM US CONGRESS IS VITAL IF VIETNAM IS TO SURVIVE. (END SUMMARY)

1. RECENT ARVN SUCCESSES AT XUAN LOC, TAN AN, AND AROUND CAN THO, PLUS FORMATION OF NEW CABINET, HAVE BROUGHT DEGREE OF CALM TO SITUATION WHICH BORDERED ON PANIC TWO WEEKS AGO. ALTHOUGH SOME OFFICIALS HAVE SENT THEIR FAMILIES OUT OF THE COUNTRY (E.G. FORMER MINISTER OF INTERIOR LE CONG CHAT) THESE OFFICIALS THEMSELVES HAVE REMAINED. MANY OTHER OFFICIALS ARE SHOWING HIGH PATRIOTISM DURING TRYING PERIOD. ESPECIALLY NOTEWORTHY ARE CASES OF MEMBERS OF NEW
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CABINET, WHO HAVE MADE CHOICE ENTAILING GREAT PERSONAL AND

PROFESSIONAL RISK TO AID COUNTRY; MODERATE AN QUANG SENATOR TON THAT NIEM AND FORMER UNIVERSITY OF CAN THO RECTOR NGUYEN DUY XUAN ARE PRIME EXAMPLES. NUMBER OF GVN CRITICS, FAR FROM TURNING TAIL, ARE DISPLAYING CONSTRUCTIVE AND DETERMINED SPIRIT. MODERATE AN QUANG SENATOR TRAN QUANG THUAN, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS WILLING TO CONSIDER JOINING GOVERNMENT AND FULLY AGREED THAT DIFFERENCES WITH THIEU MUST BE SUBMERGED DURING PRESENT CRISIS; ANOTHER EXAMPLE IF FATHER HOANG QUYNH, WHO JOINED ADVISORY COUNCIL DESPITE HIS RECENT EXTREMELY HARSH APPRAISAL OF PRESIDENT THIEU'S PERFORMANCE. AMONG GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS, DEPUTY HUNG HAS STARTED ORGANIZING FELLOW LEGISLATORS TO WRITE TO US CONGRESS ON BEHALF OF AID REQUEST, AND HAS TOLD US THIS IS MOMENT FOR DISCIPLINE. EVEN FATHER TRAN HUU THANH HAS REPORTEDLY DECIDED TO DROP HIS PACM ACTIVITIES, AND AN QUANG CHURCH, WHILE NOT PUBLICLY ASSOCIATING ITSELF WITH NEW GOVERNMENT, IS LARGELY REFRAINING FROM CRITICIZING IT.

2. OTHER CASES OF HIGH COURAGE HAVE COME TO OUR ATTENTION. ARVN MAJOR WHO WAS BATTALION COMMANDER WITH NOW DISBANDED 1ST DIVISION AND HAS NUMEROUS AWARDS FOR BRAVERY CALLED AT EMBASSY AND ASKED FOR HELP FOR HIS FAMILY IN CASE OF EMERGENCY. HE SAID HE WAS LAST MAN OUT OF HUE AND JUST REACHED SAIGON TWO DAYS AGO BUT WILL REPORT TO JGS TOMORROW FOR NEW POSTING, CERTAIN TO BE ANOTHER FIELD COMMAND. HE SAID HE HAS NO INTENTION OF GIVING UP.

3. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT FEAR OF COMMUNIST TAKEOVER HAS SUBSIDED OR THAT VIETNAMESE CONCERN FOR PERSONAL SAFETY HAS BEEN PUT ON BACK BURNER. MANY VIETNAMESE, FROM HIGH OFFICIALS ON DOWN, SEEM ENTIRELY PREOCCUPIED WITH ASSURING SAFETY OF THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES. SOME, LIKE HUE UNIVERSITY RECTOR CHAU AND HIS WIFE, A PROMINENT SAIGON LAWYER, HAVE ALREADY LEFT VIETNAM WITH THEIR FAMILY. WELL-KNOWN SINGER PHAM DUY INDICATED TO EMBOFF THAT HE IS DESPERATELY SEEKING WAY TO EXIT COUNTRY AND WOULD LEAVE EVEN WITHOUT FAMILY. VIETNAMESE AT ALL LEVELS HAVE WRITTEN TO OR CALLED AT EMBASSY ASKING HELP TO LEAVE COUNTRY OR SEEKING ASSURANCES THEY WOULD BE INCLUDED IN EVACUATION. MANY SAY THEY ARE WORRIED NOT FOR THEMSELVES BUT FOR THEIR FAMILIES, AN ATTITUDE EXPRESSED BY SENATOR AND FORMER GENERAL TON THAT DINH WHOS SAID HE PERSONALLY INTENDS TO STAY TILL END.

4. ALL VIETNAMESE HAVE FOCUSED ON US CONGRESS VOTE ON PRESIDENT
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FORD'S REQUEST FOR MILITARY AND OTHER ASSISTANCE. SOME, LIKE DEPUTIES AT THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE CHAU KIM NHAN AND COLONEL NGUYEN DANG HAI, STILL EXPRESS HOPE FOR B-52'S THOUGH THEY KNOW THAT HOPE IS FORLORN. THESE AND OTHERS SAY THEY DO NOT SEE HOW ARVN CAN CONTINUE PRESENT SUPERB PERFORMANCES IF CONGRESS REFUSES HELP. ONE SAIGON RUMOR ASSOCIATED WITH CONGRESSIONAL DECISION SAYS AMERICANS WILL EVACUTE EMBASSY ON 19TH, DATE PRESIDENT FORD SET FOR CONGRESSIONAL DECISION. THERE IS SOME HOPE THAT CONGRESS

WILL APPROVE AT LEAST PART OF REQUEST BUT COMMON FEELING IS ONE OF PESSIMISM. AN QUANG BUDDHIST SOCIAL WELFARE OFFICIAL THICH NHAT THIEN, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS HAPPY OVER ARVN PERFORMANCE AT XUAN LOC AND ELSEWHERE BUT FEARED COLLAPSE IF NO MILITARY AID IS FORTHCOMING.

5. NEW CABINET HAS NOT ELICITED ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE; MANY SEEMED, AT LEAST INITIALLY, UNINTERESTED IN FOCUSING ON CABINET IN BELIEF THAT IT IS ALREADY TOO LATE FOR ANY BUT MOST DRASTIC MEASURES, I.E., REMOVAL OF PRESIDENT THIEU. ON OTHER HAND, WE FIND WILLINGNESS TO CONCEDE THAT CABINET AND ADVISORY COUNCIL COMPRISE NUMBER OF GOOD AND REPRESENTATIVE PEOPLE AND WE EXPECT THAT PUBLIC AND OFFICIALS ALIKE WILL READILY FOLLOW CABINET'S LEAD IF CABINET PROVES WILLING TO EXERCISE LEADERSHIP.

6. PERSONAL CRITICISM OF PRESIDENT THIEU, WHILE BY NO MEANS DEAD, SEEM TO HAVE ABATED, WITH MOST PEOPLE'S ATTENTION DIRECTED TO THE PERIL IN WHICH THE COUNTRY FINDS ITSELF RATHER THAN TO THIEU'S ALLEGED FAILINGS. THIS DOES NOT INDICATE INCREASED APPROVAL OF THIEU BUT RATHER PROBABLY REFLECTS AWARENESS THAT HIS REMOVAL WOULD NOT CHANGE SITUATION. THERE ARE, OF COURSE, STILL SIZEABLE NUMBER OF VIETNAMESE WHO BELIEVE THIEU MUST GO. THIEU CONTINUES TO HAVE LITTLE CREDIBILITY, AND MOST VIETNAMESE LISTEN AVIDLY TO BBC NEWSCASTS IN BELIEF THAT THEY CANNOT TRUST GOVERNMENT INFORMATION OUTLETS.

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